

From the Mill District

By ALICE COLE.

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MR. DORKINS felt a complacent pride in Dorkins academy. He had planned it only two years ago, and now there were more than eighty pupils enrolled, some of them from adjoining states. True, he had been very liberal in his policy of teachers and appointments and had insisted that the tuition fees should be merely nominal. But still he declared the school was getting on famously, and he felt a glow of satisfaction at the end of each term when he made out a check for the amount of expense not covered by the income. Indeed, he derived more pleasure from this very expense than he did from the income of his two cotton factories down by the river.

This river property was a sore grievance to good Mr. Dorkins. He had been in possession of it only a few years, but already he was beginning to feel that it was a heavy burden for his shoulders.

The operatives were of many nationalities and of all degrees of ignorance. The former owners had not been very particular about their employees. Willingness to work for low wages had always taken precedence of character.

Mr. Dorkins began the work of reformation cheerfully. It did not seem right to him to discharge any of the hands. Somehow he had a feeling that they went with the property and that he was responsible in a measure for their future.

Clubs were established, but they speedily became places of noisy revelry and were abolished. A night school and reading room were started, but the few quiet ones who were willing to attend were driven away by the turbulent element. Schoolbooks and magazines were stuffed into the stove, and chairs and tables became weapons of offense and defense among the wild mill boys.

At the end of the year Mr. Dorkins had almost ceased active measures for their help. He would not own that he was defeated. He was only reviewing the situation, he said. In truth, he was at the end of his resources. He could see no plan by which to snare the young reprobates. It was at this time that he conceived the idea of the academy.

Ashdale was quite a large place, and the mill hands formed but a small portion of its population. Mr. Dorkins hoped that among the better class he

would find some active sympathy for his new enterprise. Nor was he disappointed. A first class academy, with such ridiculously low tuition rates, was a prize not to be lightly overlooked. Nearly every family had a son or daughter who was promptly enrolled, and day by day Mr. Dorkins' benevolent face grew more beaming and glowing. At the end of the first term there was but one drawback to his complete happiness. In the long list of names he could not find a single one from either of his two factories.

Somewhere back in his boyhood Mr. Dorkins had won a school prize, and the glow of it had always remained in his heart. Now he set to work to bring that same glow to the heart of as many boys and girls as possible. Prizes were offered for almost every kind of excellence he could think of—conduct, scholarship, advancement—



"WHO WAS THAT SPLENDID LITTLE FELLOW?" HE ASKED.

and a grand special prize of a year's schooling for the best declamation to be delivered on the last day of each school year.

Mr. Dorkins had a profound respect for a good speaker. He himself had never been able to make a speech, and this very inability had enhanced his admiration for fluency in others.

On the last day of the second year a general invitation was extended to the public to attend the closing exercises. One after another the classes came forward and went through their parts, and one after another the self-conscious pupils passed under the fire of questions and criticisms. When it was time for the declamations Mr. Dor-

kins' manner became even more attentive and expectant.

Several pupils displayed their eloquence in stirring appeals to patriotism and liberty, but they were too conscious of the audience to do their best, and when they went down from the platform it was with an uneasy feeling of having failed. At length a trim, bright faced boy of twelve or thirteen came forward and delivered an eloquent statement of the Indian question. His utterance was clear and concise and without the least trace of embarrassment. Mr. Dorkins had liked his appearance from the first, but when he heard the distinct, rapid flow of choice words his enthusiasm became so great that it was with difficulty he kept his seat. As soon as the exercises were over he drew the principal aside.

"Who was that splendid little fellow?" he asked eagerly. "The one who gave us such a clear account of the Indian question? I don't think I ever saw him before."

"No?" There was surprise in the principal's voice. "That's strange. I thought of course you knew him. He's from the mill district—one of your own people. I had an idea that you were paying their tuition."

"Their?" "Yes; his sister comes with him; that little girl who took the prize for singing. She has one of the best untrained voices I ever heard. I am very proud of them both. But it is curious you didn't know where they lived."

Mr. Dorkins looked troubled. "I haven't been in the mills much lately," he said, and the principal noticed that his voice trembled a little. "Somehow I have felt that the young people didn't like me. They have a habit of throwing snowballs and things, and— and—" He hesitated a moment, then broke into a short, nervous laugh—"of calling me 'New Jerusalem.' For the past year or so I have left things largely to the management of the superintendent. I—I thought it would be better for me to stay away. But you haven't told me the children's names yet," he added more briskly. "They must be looked up. I hope their parents will be willing to have them continue at school. Most of my factory people don't seem to have much respect for education."

"Yes, it would be a pity for them to leave just now, when they are doing so well," agreed the principal. "Still I think they are safe for a year at least. Each of them has won a year's tuition, and it is hardly likely their parents will take them away until they have reaped the benefits of the prizes. But you asked me who they were. Their names are Charlot and Charlotte Burless—a very pretty combination, I think. They were brought here on the first day of the term by a rough, ungainly fellow, who said his name was Shoggs—a twister in the mill, he said he was."

As Mr. Dorkins walked down the path he rubbed his hands together softly and indulged in a low chuckle from time to time.

"Well," he soliloquized gayly, "who'd have thought it? A pair of mill children leading the school! It will be a rare joke on Dr. Green and the others. They'll have to admit that figs do grow on thistles sometimes. Well, well— Hello! What do you want here?" sharply.

He had reached the gate which opened into the school grounds, and there, seated nonchalantly upon one of the stone posts, was a rough, shock headed boy who might have been anywhere between sixteen and eighteen years of age. Evidently he had but just come from the mill, for his feet were bare and there were bits of cotton still clinging to his coarse clothing.

It was not often that Mr. Dorkins frowned, but now his face grew hard and stern. This rough, disreputable figure was not unknown to him. Only a few weeks before he had seen him in the mill yard thrashing a boy who was much larger than himself.

At first he had not interfered. The big boy was able to take care of himself, he thought. But when he saw that he was really being hurt and that the smaller boy did not seem to have an idea of desisting he had caused them to be separated. A minute afterward, as he was walking toward his office, he had glanced over his shoulder just in time to see the smaller boy clinch his fists and savagely renew the attack.

On another occasion his hat had been knocked off by a snowball, and, looking around quickly, he had seen this same boy dodging behind a building. No wonder he had been unsuccessful in remodeling such material.

"What do you want here?" he repeated as the boy looked up from a programme he was intently trying to decipher.

"Hello, Jeru—er—oh, beg pardon, Mr. Dorkins. Glad to see you!" The boy slid quickly from his perch and held out his hand frankly.

Mr. Dorkins hesitated but an instant. He liked straightforwardness above all things, and there was something particularly fine in the clear, fearless gaze of this young barefooted factory boy.

"And I am glad to see you," he said heartily, and with the touch of those strong, warm fingers the last vestige of sternness left his face. "Are you waiting for somebody?"

"For the kids—my children, you know. Did you see 'em?" An eager light was now shining in his steady eyes. "Did they come through all right—no breakdown nor nothing?"

Mr. Dorkins looked puzzled.

"I don't think I know just whom you mean," he answered doubtfully. "Why, Char! and Sis? You must have seen 'em," impatiently. "Char! was going to speak on 'Indians,' and Sis was going to sing. I don't believe any of the east enders could hold a candle to 'em," proudly. "Seems to me

they're an awful long time coming east. Ain't the thing over?"

"Yes, it is over, but the pupils are holding a sort of reception. They'll soon be out. So they're some of your folks? Well, I am glad to see you." Mr. Dorkins was beaming now. "I don't wonder you are proud of them. I am myself. What does Mr. Burless do in the factory? I don't remember to have met him."

The boy looked him over for a moment before replying.

"There ain't no Mr. Burless nor Mrs. Burless either," he said at last gravely. "We left 'em on 'other side. The kids ain't got no folks except me. I'm father and mother and bread provider for 'em."

Mr. Dorkins looked his amazement. "You don't mean to say that you support the children and send them to school?" he asked incredulously.

"I s'pose that's the size of it. But you needn't pile it up to my account."



"YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND THE FELLERS."

almost fiercely. "It ain't nothing to my credit. I owe 'em more'n forty times as much as that."

Decidedly it was becoming interesting, and Mr. Dorkins' hand found its way to the boy's shoulder almost unconsciously.

"Would you mind telling me about it?" he asked persuasively. "You factory boys don't seem to like me very well, but I assure you I have always had your interests at heart."

"Oh, that's all right!" replied the boy easily. "I sized you up long ago. The trouble with you is that you don't understand the fellers. They're a pretty good sort all round, but they ain't cattle. First along, they thought you was trying to rope 'em into some kind of Sunday school, and it made 'em sort of independent. But they've been coming round lately. There's a good many more'n one of 'em would jump into the river to save you from drowning."

"Really—really!" exclaimed Mr. Dorkins, and there was a suspicion of moisture in his eyes. "Well, I—I never thought of such a thing. I—I—"

"It's solid, anyhow," interrupted the boy quietly. "But about the kids—you see, we're from England. I'd saved up a matter of \$100 or so and was coming to the United States to try farming. I didn't have no folks. While I was waiting for the ship I got acquainted with the Burless family. They were in the same boarding house and were waiting for a ship, like me. The place was unhealthy, and Mr. Burless took a fever and died. Then I took it, and Mrs. Burless cared for me till—till she got it herself. She was that weak and run down she couldn't rally, the doctor said. So she died, and the kids were left alone."

The boy's voice had grown low and tremulous, and he now turned his face away so that Mr. Dorkins should not see him furtively wipe his eyes. After a little hesitation he added abruptly: "That's all. I took the \$100 and brought the children over here and went to work."

"What do you intend to do with them?"

"Keep 'em at school, of course. Their folks were real educated gentry, and I'm going to bring up Char! and Sis to be like 'em. When they're done with common schools, they're going to college. I've got a pretty good knack for working, and I'll manage it somehow."

Mr. Dorkins looked at him for a full minute in silence.

"Well," he ejaculated at length. "I am more than glad to know you. But how about your own education?"

"Oh, that's all right," answered the boy lightly. "I can wait till the kids get through. Besides, I'm picking up a little as I go along. I help Char! a bit, and Char! he helps me a good deal. But of course Char! will get through first."

Mr. Dorkins saw his carriage approaching and took a few steps toward it. Then he turned and walked back.

"I saw you fighting a few weeks ago," he said, smiling. "Would you mind telling me what it was about?"

The boy hesitated.

"The—the big feller was sassing some of the mill girls," he stammered, "and I couldn't help it. After you left he fired a mean word at you, and—and I pitched in ag'in. But here come the kids."

Suspended interest.

"Would you say that author has the gift of keeping your curiosity excited?"

"After a fashion," answered Miss Cayenne. "You are constantly expecting him to say something interesting, and he is always putting it off till the new chapter."—Washington Star.

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